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REMARKS ON THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF THE CROW INDIANS

By A. A. GOLDENWEISER

DR LOWIE'S recent paper on the social life of the Crow¹ brings valuable contributions to our knowledge of the organization and customs of these Indians. The interesting chapter on "War Customs" (pp. 230-238) is stated to be an advance sheet of a more elaborate exposition of the subject, which is to follow. The section on "Joking Relationship" (pp. 204-206), its brevity notwithstanding, constitutes the first systematic treatment of these highly curious and little-understood practices. The major part of the paper, however, is devoted to the study of the Crow clan system and relationship terms (pp. 189-212). While the data there presented are of considerable intrinsic value and interest, the method of presenting the material adopted by Dr Lowie also requires a word of comment.

The Crow are organized in exogamous clans with maternal descent. At the present time breaches of the exogamous rule are known to occur. Dr Lowie mentions some six examples, but as these infractions of the ancient custom have all been committed by very young people, we may perhaps follow the author (p. 189) by discarding them. The list of clans given by Dr Lowie (p. 190) embraces thirteen clans grouped into larger units, five of which contain two clans each, and one, three clans. Had Dr Lowie numbered the clans, as he has the "phratries," say I₁, I₂, etc., the succeeding discussion would have proved more easily intelligible. As it is, the list of intermarriages, expressed in terms of thirteen clans of native name, is somewhat confusing. This list, by the way, contains two clan names, *icirete* and *tsi'pawātīse*, not included in the thirteen clans. Of these, *icirēte* seems to be identical with *úsawatsē*

¹ Lowie, Robert H., Social Life of the Crow Indians, *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History*, vol. ix, pt. II, New York, 1912.

(III₁ in the table given below), whereas the identity of *tsi'parwātitse* remains doubtful. I have disregarded both in my table.

Before we turn to Dr Lowie's interesting discussion of the clan groups with reference to exogamy, a terminological question deserves a word of comment. Dr Lowie writes (p. 193):

Mr Curtis is obviously of the opinion that the prohibition extended to the larger units, which he accordingly calls "phratries."

Dr Lowie, as we shall see, reaches a negative conclusion as to the exogamy of the "phratries" and accordingly prefers to call them clan associations. Is this identification of a phratry with its exogamous function wise? True, dual divisions most commonly designated as phratries are usually, although not invariably, exogamous. But a phratry, once exogamous, may lose its exogamy while preserving its other functions. This certainly happened among the Iroquois, and probably among the Winnebago. Should the dual divisions in these tribes therefore forfeit their claim to the term phratry? Should we above all permit the application of the term to hinge upon a trait that the phratry shares with clans, village communities, and a number of other social and local groupings? Clan exogamy, in particular, is certainly not less common than phratric exogamy. While ethnological inquiry has shown that certain functions are more commonly associated with certain social groups than with others, it remains no less true that almost any social group may become associated with almost any function. Therefore it seems advisable not to permit a term applied to a social group to depend upon its functions but upon some more general as well as more vague characteristic. I should propose that the term phratry be applied to any subdivision of a tribe that itself embraces at least two smaller social units. The clan associations of the Crow, whether exogamous or not, would then be phratries.

In a rather careful analysis of his data Dr Lowie tries to weigh the evidence for and against the former exogamy of the Crow phratry. He writes:

Had this been the case [prohibition of marriage within the phratry] clan exogamy might follow as a necessary consequence of phratric

exogamy, and a special investigation would be required to determine whether the exogamous rule applied originally to the lesser or the larger social unit. If, on the other hand, the second statement is accepted ["marriage within the phratry was rare"], we might regard the tendency to eschew marriage with a member of a sister-clan as merely an extension of what must then be viewed as fundamentally a characteristic of the *clan* (p. 194).¹

While fully endorsing this statement of Dr Lowie's, I cannot subscribe to the passage immediately following, which reads as follows:

Assuming provisionally the latter alternative, we shall be prepared to find different rules for the several clan-associations inasmuch as it is quite conceivable that a prohibition originally confined to one clan may in some cases be extended to the linked clan, while in other associations no such extension takes place [*ibid.*].

But "different rules for the several clan-associations" would be just as plausible on the assumption that the phratries once exogamous had lost that function in favor of the clans, but that the phratric exogamy, thoroughly superseded in some instances by the exogamy of the clan, lingered on in some other cases on a par with the more recent clan regulation. Such as it stands, Dr Lowie's case does not carry conviction.² We shall presently see, moreover, that an entirely different interpretation of the data may deserve consideration. When Dr Lowie, on the other hand, refers to Crow accounts of overgrown clans separating into smaller divisions and of clans reduced in numbers merging to form one whole, both processes seem credible enough, the latter process having in fact been described among the Kwakiutl, while the former must certainly have taken place more than once among the Iroquois.

¹ Cf. "Totemism, An Analytical Study," *Journal of American Folk-Lore*, 1910, section on "Exogamy and Endogamy," pp. 231-243; "Andrew Lang on Method in the Study of Totemism," *American Anthropologist*, n. s., xiv, 1912, pp. 385-386.

² In another place (*American Anthropologist*, vol. xiv, 1912, p. 66) Dr Lowie writes: "The fact that the large groups have no names is significant, but cannot be considered as more than presumptive evidence against the hypothesis of exogamy." Even that, however, is saying too much, as exogamous groups without names certainly occur. The dual divisions of the five Iroquois tribes constitute a case in point. They certainly were exogamous, but seem never to have had any names. Or, if a breach of geographical continuity be permitted, we may instance the case of Australia, where nameless exogamous phratries are by no means uncommon.

marriages recorded, while column A may be of service whenever the total number of marriages in each clan is of importance. In addition to giving an instantaneous résumé of an otherwise unwieldy mass of data, a table such as this may serve as a convenient foundation of work among the same people by the author or others. As new marriage records accumulate, they can readily be added to the tabulated figures and the totals changed accordingly.

While there seems to be no doubt as to the former historical unity of the Crow and the Hidatsa,¹ Dr Lowie insists on the fundamental differences in the social organizations of the two tribes, as described in more recent times. In his article on "Some Problems in the Ethnology of the Crow and Village Indians,"² Dr Lowie writes:

We may conclude that the system of exogamous groups with matrilineal descent is a Crow-Hidatsa peculiarity. At the same time we must remember that the resemblance between the social organization of these two tribes is limited to this one rather general feature. Indeed, the common possession of this single feature gains significance only through its absence in other tribes.

In the concluding remarks on the social organization of the Crow, Dr Lowie returns to this point in the following passage:

Among the Crow there is no suggestion of a dual division, while the Hidatsa clans are assembled in two moieties distinguished by the number of their constituent units as the Three-Clans and the Four-Clans. Obviously, these definite social groups cannot be considered the equivalents of the six nameless Crow clan-associations.

It thus appears that not only are the Crow and Hidatsa quite different from the surrounding Plains tribes of both the Siouan and other stocks, but even between the Crow and Hidatsa there are far-reaching differences. Accordingly, we cannot advance in any positive way the theory that their social systems are but differentiations from an older system that existed prior to their separation [p. 207].

In view of the former unity of the Crow and the Hidatsa, the last statement must not be understood literally, but must be taken to mean that Dr Lowie regards the traits of social organization now

¹ See, e. g., *Handbook of American Indians*, I, p. 367.

² *American Anthropologist*, n. s., XIV, 1912, p. 66.

characteristic of the Crow and the Hidatsa as of later origin than the separation of the two tribes. Now, the Hidatsa are still organized in two moieties, the names of which, Three-Clans and Four-Clans, must have been suggested by a preëxisting clan system. But whereas the names are young, the social divisions may be old. This becomes highly probable in view of the great prevalence and antiquity of such dual divisions among Indian tribes in general and many Siouan tribes in particular, among whom, as among the Hidatsa, the dual divisions coëxist with a clan system. Thus there can scarcely be any doubt that the phratries of the Hidatsa antedate the separation of the Crow, some two hundred years ago.¹

If so, the Crow, before their separation, must have shared with the Hidatsa this trait of their social organization. Here a serious difficulty confronts us: granted the former existence of Crow dual divisions, how is it that Dr Lowie's investigations failed to reveal any survivals of the ancient system? The only plausible explanation would lie in some feature of the later transformations of the Crow that may have tended to obscure or even completely to obliterate the preceding organization. That the source of such a development may have been supplied by the clan-associations or phratries of the Crow, is suggested by Dr Radin's researches among the Winnebago.² Dr Radin found among this people a division into two phratries, one consisting of eight clans, the other of four. These clans were associated in groups of two and three in such a way that one clan of one phratry was linked to one or two clans of the other phratry. Between such linked clans there was considerable intimacy of relations, and reciprocal functions were exercised by them. Now, if we assume that a dual division among the Crow, which on general grounds we found to be highly probable, actually existed, may not the clans of the Crow also have formed associations across phratry limits? In time, exogamy, presumably

¹ I feel bound to adduce here Dr Lowie's opinion that Matthews' chronological estimate as to the separation of the Crow is somewhat in the nature of a guess. For all we know, the separation may have taken place long before that date. Now, it is, of course, obvious that the longer the period since the separation, the greater the general possibility of the development of Hidatsa phratries after the separation. Thus, the argument in the text would to that extent be weakened.

² Manuscript.

associated with the dual divisions, lost its hold on the large units and became a clan characteristic. As the clan associations became more firmly consolidated, the dual divisions thus cut up and redistributed became obscured, and, in the course of time, obliterated, whereas the clan associations developed into the present phratries. That the phratries of such origin should have remained nameless seems highly plausible. In the light of the above hypothesis certain facts about clan contests adduced by Dr Lowie (pp. 202-204) suggest an interpretation different from the one given by the author. Crow informants do not seem to be agreed as to the social units that figure in such contests. In fact, four different explanations are given in which the contestants are described as the sons of men of two clans, or as men of two clans, or as the sons of men of two linked clans, or as any two groups of men without relation to the clans. Granted the two ancient exogamous divisions, it may well be assumed that they constituted the social units which originally figured in such contests. Without being inherently improbable, this hypothesis would also help us reconcile the statements of Dr Lowie's informants. With the weakening of phratric bonds, the functions at contests would be transferred to the clans without abandoning *de facto* the phratric principle. Clansmen of one phratry would contest with clansmen of the other; or the sons of clansmen of one phratry would line up against the sons of clansmen of the other, which arrangement, with phratric exogamy, would still preserve the phratric division. If linked clans originally belonged to two opposite sides, then the sons of clansmen in contesting against the sons of men of the linked clan would also conform to the ancient rule of phratric contests. If, on the other hand, one of the rival groups in the last two instances is examined with reference to its composition, it may well be described as amorphous in so far as it embraces men of different clans.¹

I was prompted to present the above arguments by the realization of the great probability, on historical grounds, of the former

¹ I encountered a situation analogous to the above among the Iroquois, where certain functions commonly ascribed by observers to the father's clan seem to have originally belonged to the opposite phratry.

existence of dual divisions among the Crow. The several hypotheses, however, are suggested with the greatest diffidence, less in the expectation of their ultimate verification by fact than in the hope that Dr. Lowie and other investigators may thereby be stimulated toward further efforts in their search for traces of ancient dual divisions among the Crow.

Dr Lowie takes pains not to have his list of terms of relationship appear as final. He writes:

The following list must not be regarded as exhaustive nor the translations as more than tentative. After repeated revision I came to the conclusion that nothing short of a perfect knowledge of the Crow language would suffice for a perfect list of terms of consanguinity and affinity. For [as Dr Lowie curiously puts it] in addition to the common enough multiplicity of meanings for any one term when translated into English, the student of Crow has to deal with distinct native terms expressing delicate shades of meanings that are fully known only to the older Indians [p. 208].

The experience of investigators with primitive terminologies certainly justifies the author's remarks. It remains nevertheless true that a system of relationship is not merely a terminology but a system, a system based on some definite principle of classification of individuals. The study of terminologies of relationship among many peoples has shown that the principles of classification on which such systems rest always prove exceedingly simple and, as soon as revealed, serve to coördinate the apparently complex series of terms. There seems, therefore, no justification for ethnographers to limit themselves to an objective enumeration of the terms of relationship without attempting to explain the underlying system. Dr Lowie has attempted no such analysis, wherefore his list of terms strikes one as exceedingly complex, in fact, bewildering. I have analyzed and represented in tabular form part of the Crow terms contained in Dr Lowie's list, and offer my results here as a supplement to his investigations.

First of all we must eliminate from the list a number of terms that are not terms of relationship and ought to have been treated separately. I mean such terms as *bîwatkucè*, "my joking relative";

baráke, "my child"; *bacik'áake*, "my boy"; *bacbatsé*, "my man"; *bacbié*, "my woman"; etc. The remaining terms on pages 208-210 are, in part, represented in the following tables. As my aim is rather to elucidate the underlying principles of the system than to give an exhaustive treatment of it, I have included in the tables only two generations, that of the *ego* and the first ascending generation. From these the first descending generation can readily be constructed. The terms used by a woman, which are in part the same as, and in part different from, those used by a man, reveal no new principle; therefore I have limited the tables to the terms used by a man. To achieve greater clearness, the terms applied to male relatives are grouped in Table II; those applied to female relatives in Table III.

TABLE II

	<i>Mother's side</i>		<i>Father's side</i>			<i>Clan-mates</i>
<i>First ascending generation</i>	Mother's brother	Mother's sister's husband	Father	Father's brother	Father's sister's husband	Men of Father's Clan
		Mother's sister's son (elder than <i>Ego</i>)	Elder brother	Father's brother's son (elder than <i>Ego</i>)	Father's sister's son (elder than <i>Ego</i>)	Older clansmen of <i>Ego</i>
<i>Generation of Ego</i>		Mother's sister's son (younger than <i>Ego</i>)	Younger brother	Father's brother's son (younger than <i>Ego</i>)	Father's sister's son (younger than <i>Ego</i>)	Younger clansmen of <i>Ego</i>

A still further extension of the terms must be suggested here. If "father's brother" is equivalent to "father" and "mother's sister" to "mother," then "father's mother's sister's son" and "father's father's brother's son" are also equivalent to "father." Theoretically there is no reason to stop at the second ascending generation, and the principle may thus be expressed in the following terms: Two men who are the descendants, no matter how remote, of two brothers or of two sisters, are "brothers"; similarly, two women who are descendants, no matter how remote, of two brothers or of two sisters, are "sisters." The same principle would, of course, apply to "father's sister's husbands" and to "mother's sister's husbands," etc. Thus, the number of individuals to whom the terms "father," "mother," etc., would apply, would be vastly increased. Nor is this all. For, if "father's sister's husband" is equivalent to "father" and "father's brother's wife" to "mother," then "father's sister's husband's father's sister's husband" should be equivalent to "grandfather" and "father's sister's husband's father's brother's wife" to "grandmother," and so on. A large number of

other logical possibilities could be similarly constructed on the basis of the fundamental principles of the system.

This argument must not be regarded in the light of a formal logical exercise; for it has been repeatedly shown that Indians, or for that matter Australians, are fully able to see the logical corollaries of their relationship systems and, when occasion arises, do consciously apply them. It has also been shown, in a number of concrete instances, just how far the logical extension of the system was carried. Dr Radin, for instance, tells me that among the Winnebago, relationships beyond the second ascending generation are not taken cognizance of.

The question arises: How far beyond the limits of the tables here adduced do the Crow permit their logic to extend their system of relationship? Further information from Dr Lowie on this point would be highly desirable.

TABLE III

	<i>Clan-mates</i>	<i>Mother's Side</i>	<i>Father's Side</i>	
<i>First ascending generation</i>	women of mother's clan	mother's sister	mother	father's brother's wife [father's sister]
<i>Generation of ego</i>	elder clanswomen of ego	mother's sister's daughter (older than ego)	elder sister	father's brother's daughter (older than ego) father's sister's daughter (older than ego)
			ego male	
	younger clanswomen of ego	mother's sister's daughter (younger than ego)	younger sister	father's brother's daughter (younger than ego) father's sister's daughter (younger than ego)

It seems that not all "women of mother's clan" are "mothers" but only those of her clan and generation. Similarly, the terms "elder or younger sisters" are not applied to *all* elder or younger clanswomen of *ego* but only to those of the generation of *ego*. While Dr Lowie does not feel absolutely positive as to this fact, it must be provisionally accepted as the more plausible development. For, if *all* women of the mother's clan were called "mothers" and all women of the clan of *ego*, which is identical with the mother's clan, were called "elder or younger sisters," we should face the highly improbable situation, even in a classificatory system of relationship, of a woman being called "mother" as well as "sister."

In addition to the uses indicated in the tables, the terms "father" and "mother" are also applied by the Crow to wife's father and mother and to husband's father and mother. In the second

ascending generation only two terms are used, "grandfather" and "grandmother," which are applied to the parents of all individuals in the first ascending generation. The first descending generation embraces the children of all individuals of the generation of *ego*; the only terms used are "son" and "daughter." The same terms are also applied to grandchildren.

Additional terms applied to relatives by marriage are given by Dr Lowie on pages 210-212. I shall not here analyze these terms.

The characteristic features of the Crow system of relationship may now be summarized as follows:

1. The application of the terms "father" and "mother" (and of corresponding terms in other generations) is exceedingly wide: the terms cover certain relatives on the father's as well as on the mother's side, parents-in-law, and father's or mother's clan-mates (regardless of generation. See 4).

2. In the generation of *ego* separate terms are used for individuals older and younger than *ego*.

3. The mother's brother, regardless of age, is included in the class of individuals older than *ego* of the generation of *ego*.¹

4. The differentiation of generations beyond the first ascending and the first descending generations appears very weak, in so far, at least, as it is reflected in the terminology of relationship. The last two points (3 and 4) indicate a tendency in the Crow system to disregard the limits of generations. Whereas, on the one hand, the lateral application of terms follows, in the main, the lines of a generation; on the other hand, the generations are disregarded in a number of ways: the terms "father," "mother,"² "sister,"² "brother," etc., are applied to corresponding clan-mates without regard to generation; one highly important individual ("mother's

¹ In society organized on a maternal basis the position of the mother's brother is altogether exceptional. His authority in the family is usually greater than that of the father, and he also appears as the main figure, if not in the ownership, at least in the transfer of property by inheritance. These psychological conditions might be deemed sufficient to account for the terminological phenomenon noted above, if not for the fact that in most, if not all, groups other than the Crow identical psychological situations are not reflected in the system of relationship. Perhaps some special economic or ceremonial relations account for the peculiarity?

² Compare, however, the legend of Table III.

brother") of the first ascending generation is classed with one age group of the generation of *ego*; no separate terms seem to exist for the second ascending generation, the terms used being derived from those for "father" and "mother"; the second descending generation is altogether merged in the first descending generation.

5. Separate terms are used for male and for female relatives.

6. Part of the terms used by a man for relatives of a given degree of blood relationship are different from those used by a woman.

7. Whereas the terms for "father" in direct address and indirect reference are quite different, the distinction in case of most other terms consists in the common Siouan change of the terminal *a* to a terminal *e*.

The Crow system of relationship is particularly suggestive in so far as it reveals with unusual clearness the process of its own development. It seems highly improbable that the terms originally used for one's own father and mother should have been the same as those used for a number of relatives on the father's and mother's side as well as for parents-in-law. But here the individuals concerned belong at least to one generation. The probability of the situation becomes quite negligible when we consider that the same terms are also used for father's clan-mates and mother's clan-mates. That a term applied to a number of individuals of one generation and to a group of clan-mates should include accidentally, as it were, one's own mother or father, is altogether incredible. Moreover, why should the same term have been applied to the individuals of one generation and to the clan-mates? If, on the other hand, one assumes the terms for "father" and "mother," in the descriptive sense, to have been primary, the entire process becomes perfectly plausible, in fact obvious as a gradual extension of the original meaning of the terms so as to include classes of people united by the principles of generation or of clanship.¹

¹ Assuming the former existence of dual divisions among the Crow, this process of extension in the application of relationship terms gains in plausibility; for all the individuals to whom the terms "father" and "mother" are applied would then belong to one phratry. The extension would then have to be conceived of as following different lines within the phratry, the line of relations on the father's and mother's side, of one generation; the line of wife's or husband's relations, of the same generation; and the line of clanship, regardless of generation (in case of "father" at least).

Applying the same reasoning to the other terms of relationship, we arrive at a reconstruction of the *Ur-Crow* system of relationship consisting of a small number of descriptive terms. They may be represented in the following table.

TABLE IV

English equivalents	<i>ego</i> male	<i>ego</i> male or female	<i>ego</i> female
2nd ascending generation { grandmother grandfather	<i>axé isá'ke</i>	<i>masa'káare</i>	<i>masá'k-isá'ka</i>
1st ascending generation { mother father father's sister	<i>axé</i>	<i>i'g'-á</i> <i>basbáxie¹</i>	<i>masáka</i>
Generation of <i>ego</i> { elder sister younger sister elder brother (mother's brother) younger brother	<i>bása'isúila²</i>	<i>bása'káata</i>	<i>basóoka</i>
	<i>búik'a</i>		<i>basá'are</i>
		<i>maisúka</i>	
1st and 2nd descending generations { daughter (grand-daughter) son (grandson)		<i>iróoce³</i> <i>xúutse</i>	

The table suggests a number of queries. We find that a man and a woman use different terms for "father"; for "mother," on the other hand, there exists only one term. Again, the male and female terms for "grandfather" are derived from the respective terms for "father"; while there is only one term for "grandmother." The latter term seems to be derived from a female term for "mother," and it seems exceedingly improbable that it should also have been the original male term for "grandmother." The situation suggests an old female term for "mother," *masa'ká*, of which *masa'ké* (given by Dr Lowie, p. 209) would be the vocative form, and of which *masa'káare* would be a derivative. It may also be

¹ The existence of a separate term for "father's sister" suggests a possible former term for "brother's son or daughter" applied by the father's sister to his children. Did such a term exist?

² Did not the terms for "elder sister" or "younger sister" extend to brother's wife?

³ Did not this term extend to (male speaking) wife's brother's son and daughter's husband, and (female speaking) to husband's brother's son?

worth while to look for an old male term for "grandmother," perhaps derived from *i'g'a'*, which term, before the loss of the female term for "mother," may have been a male term. Again *basbâxiè* seems to be a derivative of *axé*, suggesting the former existence of a separate female term for "father's sister." This is the more probable as two terms are used for "mother's brother." However plausible may seem the identification of "mother's brother" with "elder brother," it scarcely could have been primary, and old terms for "mother's brother" may be looked for, or, if *b'ik'a* and *basâare* were the original terms for "mother's brother," other terms may have existed for "elder brother" which were lost subsequent to the reclassification. The former existence of separate male and female terms for "elder sister" and "younger brother" also seems highly probable.¹

¹ Mention must be made here of a recent elaborate attempt to represent a system of relationship diagrammatically. I refer to John P. Harrington's article on "Tewa Relationship Terms" (*American Anthropologist*, July-September, 1912) which contains four highly complicated diagrams (pp. 483-486), the preparation of which must have consumed much time and labor. This notwithstanding, the diagrams are no less perplexing than L. H. Morgan's brain-wrecking lists or Dr Lowie's objective enumeration of terms. The reason of the failure of these authors lies in the fact that they have not attempted to base their presentation of systems of relationship on the native principle of classification of individuals. Whenever this is done, the system always reduces itself to a few simple principles and can readily be represented in tabular form. The two tables of Crow relationships presented in this review may serve to substantiate the above statement. A similar attempt to present a system of relationship from the native point of view has been successfully carried out by Professor Boas in John R. Swanton's monograph on the Haida (*Publications of the Jesup North Pacific Expedition*, vol. 5, p. 64).